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Bedsprings

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A few of the FINE LITTLE DESKS left for CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

A City With A General Manager

How Staunton, Virginia, Has Made One Dollar of City Money Go as Far as Two Went Before

Honolulu's present struggle with the problems of city government, the certainty that some kind of a change in the present charter must be made by the next legislature, the intense interest with which new progressive plans are now being discussed, makes the article below particularly timely. It tells how one city, Staunton, Va., has rescued itself from bankruptcy by the appointment of a city manager and the centralization of power in him. The article is by Henry Oyen in the World's Work:

One Saturday afternoon in April, 1908, a crew of workmen employed on the streets of Staunton, Va., pushed their way up to the city paymaster's window, drew their paychecks, looked at them in surprise, then drew together and talked it over. At last one of them stepped back to the window.

"Say, boss," he said, "these checks are all wrong."

"What's the matter with them?"

"Why, they give us three days' pay for the week."

"Well, that's right. You only work three days. The other three days it rained. Three days' pay is all you earned. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"But, boss," protested the man, "this is a city job! We never heard of anything like this before. When it rains we always go over in the school house basement and sit and talk, and our time goes on just the same."

"Well, it won't any more," was the sharp answer. "There's been a change. There is a General Manager in this town now, and a city job has ceased to be a loafer's cinch. From now on city money is going to buy just as much as private money. Do you understand?"

"Mister," said the man, "there's something that I just can't believe."

In this fashion the "Staunton Plan" of municipal management was inaugurated and received. By it a step forward in the science of city government has been taken. A regularly incorporated American city with its business affairs managed on a strictly business basis, as the affairs of a business corporation are managed, with economy and efficiency the watchwords in place of politics and spoils, has become a reality—an established fact in history, by which other cities may take their bearings in the day of strenuous casting about for the much sought haven of Good City Government.

Staunton, Va., planted down among the blue-veiled hills of the lower Shenandoah Valley, population approximately 12,000, has had for the last three years, or since March, 1908, "Business in the City Hall," as no other city has had it. During these years it has been a municipal corporation turned into a business corporation. It has had a General Manager, one man, carefully selected, hired, and paid, to manage its business affairs as business affairs should be managed. And in these three years Staunton has been made over. It has lifted from mud to asphalt. A fine old town, which was sagging badly at its foundation, has been placed on a sound basis without any increase in city expenditures; and the fact has been established that under honest, capable business management—under the Staunton Plan as it has been operated in Staunton—the value of the city's money to the city is increased by at least 100 per cent.

The Situation.

To appreciate the history of this remarkable civic experience it is well to know something of Staunton, the scene of the innovation.

It is not a progressive town, as Des Moines is progressive, or Memphis, or Kansas City. It is an old town with traditions that reach back to the days of the Old South. The growth of its population is less than the natural increase. It runs to church spires and schools rather than to smoke-stacks and industries. Gov. Woodrow Wilson was born there in the manse of the old Presbyterian church. The manse today has a new coat of olive green paint; otherwise it is the same as when old Doctor Wilson thundered in the pulpit next door. Woodrow Wilson removed from Staunton at the early age of a few months. Many have followed in the Governor's young footsteps. Staunton has regarded their departure with equanimity. The city has not developed much. Instead it has succeeded in raising and uncommonly fine crop of intelligent and educated citizens. That is why the Plan came to Staunton.

These intelligent and educated citizens naturally were not skilled in the science of city management any more than the citizens of any town were skilled in this science. They were lawyers, bankers, merchants and so on. In their various vocations they were experts, and successful. In the city hall—which was something

quite out of their line, where duty came to them as strong as members of the community—they were not expert and not successful. There is nothing exceptional about this; you can find the same condition prevailing in a thousand other city governments. But in Staunton, because of the physical peculiarities of its location, the results stood out in a way that even the blind might observe.

Staunton may be divided into three portions. There is the downtown district—the business district—which lies on the floor of a valley, and may be said to be four blocks square. Long, high hills wall in this small heart of the city. On the slopes is what might be called the intermediate district, composed mainly of residences, schools and churches, with a few small stores and business establishments scattered here and there. Beyond this, on top of the surrounding hills, and farther beyond, is the outlying district, composed entirely of scattered residences, the suburbs of Staunton. From the heart of the city to this outlying fringe is about a mile.

Under its old-fashioned double-council system of government, Staunton had paved and kept in some sort of fashion its tiny business district. The intermediate district had at one time, long ago, been paved in crude fashion with crushed stone. But as the years went by and nothing was done for the district's upkeep the crushed stone had been worn away, and the streets became little more than mud roads. The outlying district had no streets at all. This condition resulted not from poverty in revenues, and not from any direct graft on the part of its governing body. Staunton has approximately \$150,000 a year to care for itself, and no one can be found in the city who believes that there was anything but honesty in the council. But Staunton was like a business corporation without a manager and with only an amateur board of managers who gave but a small part of their time, and only a little thought to the work of directing its affairs.

Records Chaotic.

I wished to find out how some of the city's money had been spent in these years. I didn't succeed. Nobody knew, nobody could find out. There had been no records kept. It had been spent—all of it, and honestly—but how, nobody could tell. Under this lack of system Staunton was paying about one block of street each year, other streets were wearing out much more rapidly, and the town was sinking back into its mud roads. It owed \$600,000 and was running deeper and deeper into debt, being forced each year to borrow money to meet the deficit that resulted from its lack of management. It was on the path that leads to bankruptcy.

This was the condition of Staunton, a mid town sinking beneath its indebtedness, when a few of its leading citizens began casting around for a means to save it. The constitution of Virginia (noble old relic!) requires cities of the first class to maintain a mayor and two branches of the council, the board of aldermen and the common council. In Staunton the complete council numbers twenty-two. Being thus deprived of the right to adopt government by commission, Staunton began to search its own ingenuity to devise a new scheme of government.

Mr. John R. Crosby, President of the Common Council, Mr. H. H. Lang, President of the Board of Aldermen, and Mr. W. R. Sydnor, a councilman were the leading spirits in furthering the movement, and may be called the fathers of the General Manager Plan. In March, 1908, Mr. Crosby introduced an ordinance which was passed by the council providing for the appointment by the council of a General Manager whose duties were prescribed as follows:

The General Manager shall devote his entire time to the duties of his office, and shall have entire charge and control of all the executive work of the city in its various departments, and have entire charge and control of the heads of departments and employees of the city. He shall make all contracts for labor and supplies, and in general perform all of the administrative and executive work now performed by the several standing committees of the Council, except the Finance, Ordinance and Auditing Committees. The General Manager shall discharge such other duties as may from time to time be required of him by the Council.

Salary Swells Too.

The maximum salary was placed at \$25,000 a year. The position was advertised, for this was a new kind of job and there was no place to look for the right man. There never had been a General Manager of a city before. Applications began to come in. Most of them naturally were from local men,

from plumbers, contractors, superintendents, and so forth. All these were willing to work for much less than the maximum salary, the figures demanded running from \$1,000 to \$1,800 a year. There was just one applicant who placed his minimum figure at the council's maximum. He was an outside man, Mr. Charles E. Ashburner, of Richmond, Va.

Seven years ago there had been a washout in the business district of the city, a subterranean creek going on a rampage and swallowing up a good section of Staunton real estate. Local contractors were called to bid upon the work of repairing the damage and the lowest figure offered on the job was \$4,000. A few councilmen demurred and called the bids too high. They were assured that the work couldn't be done for less, but one of them, Mr. W. R. Sydnor, happened to be local agent of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and Mr. Ashburner happened to be the C. & O.'s engineer of maintenance for the Staunton division. Sydnor sent for Ashburner and asked him to calculate what the washout could be repaired for, the work being done as cheaply as if it were a railroad job. Ashburner calculated and said:

"Seven hundred and thirty-seven dollars will leave you a little margin."

The local contractors scoffed, but the councilmen went to work and had the work done under their own direction, and the complete bill was \$725 and a few cents.

The council elected Ashburner when they saw his name among the applicants for the General Manager's position.

Beats Opposition.

Ashburner made a success of his job from the beginning, in spite of some opposition. This alone proved him to be a rather extraordinary man, for the position of General Manager is one requiring many peculiar qualifications to fill. Staunton was fortunate in getting at the beginning a man in whom these qualifications were combined. Ashburner is forty-two years old, the son of an English army officer, and was born in India. He was educated in France and Germany, winding up at Heidelberg. He is a civil engineer. His training since leaving school has been essentially practical. He has been engineer in charge of a company town in Virginia, was connected with the Bureau of Highways of the United States, he served in a similar capacity for the State of Virginia, was in charge of maintenance work on the C. & O. R. R. and did engineering work for the city of Richmond. He is medium-sized and twitching with the nervous energy that marks the enthusiast. He is a practical idealist; no one can talk with him for five minutes without realizing that his nature would throw him body and soul into such a work as town management, that his thoughts would be of the work before himself. A man of Staunton whom he had antagonized went up and down the streets, loudly announcing that he was going up to Ashburner's office and run him out of town. Men who had worked with the General Manager on the railroad sought out the man and said:

"You don't know that man. You may run him out of town sure enough, but he'll be right there in his office working away any time you tell him you're coming to do it."

The man quit talking.

His strongest characteristics probably are his desire for "doing a job right," his enthusiasm, his excessive supply of energy, and his inclination to shake hands with everybody, including his avowed enemies. When he was given the task of running Staunton his natural enthusiasm drove him to a single aim:

"To make this the finest little city in America, bar none!"

His interpretation of the job was: "I am hired by everybody in this town. I am working for everybody in it, rich and poor, black and white. Every citizen is a shareholder in this corporation, and every one of them is entitled to a shareholder's full privileges. As manager of the affairs of their corporation I am responsible to each and every one of them. My office is a clearing house for shareholders."

The office was opened April 15, 1908. It was not located in the city hall, but in a two-room suite on the second floor of a business block in the heart of the downtown district. On the door was stenciled:

"General Manager, City of Staunton."

Those two rooms soon became the most popular offices in town. Staunton at this time, as we have seen, was mostly a mud town, with no discernible prospects of becoming anything else. City money, under the old mismanagement, covered the floor of the valley; but it wouldn't reach up the hills. Ashburner's first

(Continued on page 27.)

HERE!

The Annual Worry

"What Shall I Give Him for Christmas?"

Nothing Easier To Solve If He Is A Smoker

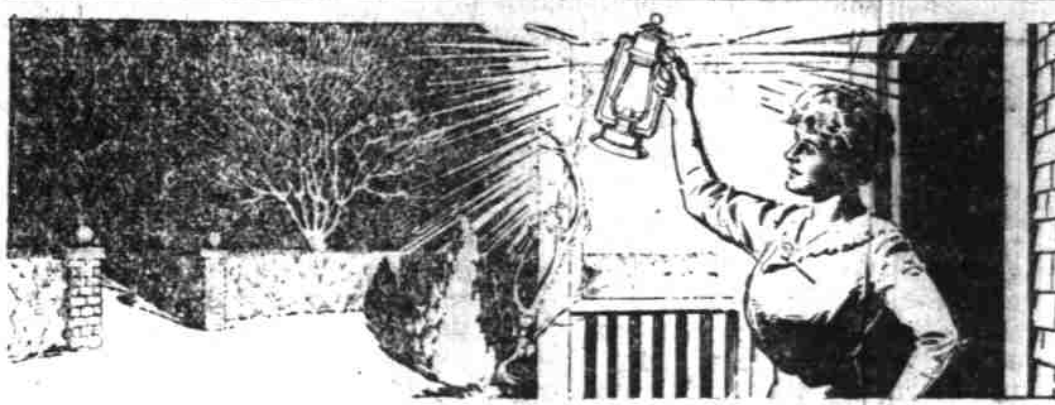
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